



Barriers to Mental Health Services

Just as it is common for adults in the United States to suffer from mental health disorders, it also is common for children. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five children has a mental disorder that severely affects daily functioning – or has had such a disorder in the past.¹ Fifty percent of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and 75 percent begin by age 24.² Research has shown that early mental health intervention can lead to improved long-term mental health.³

Yet, despite knowing this, experts estimate that more than half of children with a diagnosed mental health disorder do not receive mental health services,⁴ and there is an average delay of eight to 10 years between the onset of symptoms and when children receive intervention or treatment. When families have trouble getting access to high-quality mental health services for their children, it can leave those children with untreated or under-treated mental health disorders. A study found that about 35 percent of families with a child in need of mental health services believed they had had a difficult time getting mental health care for their children.⁵ This information brief looks at barriers that keep children and youth from getting quality mental health services. It also explains ways families can overcome these challenges and the resources they can tap into for support.

Barriers to children’s mental health care come in many forms. They include *situations*, such as when services are too far away or families must wait too long to get an appointment; and *perceptions*, such as the belief that a child’s mental health disorder is not serious or a fear of what family might say.⁵ A national study from 2011 suggested that perception barriers often kept families from seeking or stopping mental health treatment. This was especially true for children with more severe conditions.⁶

Project AWARE Ohio developed an information brief entitled “Barriers to Mental Health Services” that describes barriers, ways to address those barriers, and resources that may be useful in those mitigation efforts.

This resource can be downloaded at:

http://resources.oberlinkconsulting.com/uploads/infobriefs/Barriers_to_MH_Services_Information_Brief.pdf

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3. Task Force on Early Mental Health Intervention (2003, June). Addressing missed opportunities for early childhood mental health intervention: Current knowledge and policy implications. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/early-mental-health.pdf>
4. Power, T. J., Eiraldi, R. B., Clarke, A. T., Mazzuca, L. B., & Krain, A. L. (2005). Improving Mental Health Service Utilization for Children and Adolescents. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 20(2), 187-205. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/scpq.20.2.187.66510>
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